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Nigeria: Challenges to Moderation

Special National Intelligence Estimate

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1 August 1988

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NIGERIA: CHALLENGES TO MODERATION

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The Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State and the Treasury.

Also Participating:

The Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army

The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy

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SCOPE NOTE

This Estimate assesses the outlook for political instability in Nigeria over the next two years as the moderate* senior officers who seized power last December attempt to hang on in the face of continued economic deterioration and the constant threat of a coup. The SNIE highlights the depth of the political challenges facing Nigeria and the narrow range of options and resources available to current leaders who seek to continue Nigeria's generally moderate, pragmatic, and pro-Western domestic and foreign policies. In addition, we outline the most serious threats—particularly from frustrated radical* junior and middle grade Army officers—to the regime, possible opportunities for increased Soviet and Libyan meddling, and the implications of Nigeria's uncertain future for the United States.

Nigeria's economic problems have been reported comprehensively in other recent intelligence publications and are not dealt with in detail in this Estimate. Nor does the assessment include extensive treatment of the outlook for political stability and economic development in the longer term. More detailed analysis of these prospects will depend in large measure on the government's performance during what we believe will be the critical next two years.

* The Intelligence Community realizes that not all senior officers are "moderate," nor are they likely to act with moderation at all times. At the same time, not all junior officers are "radical," particularly if that word is taken to mean leftist or Marxist-Leninist oriented. The critical point is that a government led by junior officers probably would act more impetuously than one led by senior officers and may not be as friendly to the West.

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KEY JUDGMENTS

Nigeria's political climate during the next two years will be highly volatile, subject to sudden, unanticipated and perhaps violent leadership changes, and there could be temptations to experiment with political and economic structures either along radical populist lines or to redress perceived ethnic inequalities. Preoccupation with coup threats and potential popular unrest will prevent whoever governs from taking even the first halting steps toward longer term economic recovery and establishing stable political institutions.

The fragile social fabric and political order already severely strained by persistent ethnic and regional rivalries, and by growing public frustration with the inability of any Nigerian government to realize the country's economic and political promise, will be further strained if economic decline remains unchecked. Serious ethnic division and ungovernability over the longer run would increase Nigeria's vulnerability to breakup along regional lines which the 1967-70 civil war narrowly averted.

Barring decisive changes in their approach to economic problems, the moderate senior northern officers who seized power last December may at best be able to muddle through, maintaining Nigeria's existing structure and generally pro-Western domestic and foreign policies while holding at bay coup plotting by junior and middle grade officers. In any event, there is a better-than-even chance that less senior officers will seize power, perhaps violently lashing out at those they hold responsible for failing to realize Nigeria's economic and political potential. We foresee very little possibility in the near term that Nigeria's armed forces will return power to civilians, but some form of mixed military/civilian government may evolve, possibly dominated by radicals.

Even if General Buhari's government manages to hang on, the facade of senior officer unity is likely to fray in the face of economic woes that defy quick solution and dwindling public support. A shuffle of key officers—a strong possibility—could provide cosmetic change but will do little to improve the regime's lackluster and disorganized performance or ameliorate the discontent of others in the military who hold this and past governments culpable for Nigeria's current economic decline, political decay, and international ineffectiveness. Moreover, the government will find it increasingly difficult to allay the already strong

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suspicion among southern and minority tribal groups that the current regime is little more than an extension of the former northern, Muslim-dominated civilian government in uniform.

Despite the dismal outlook under a senior officer dominated government, prospects for economic recovery and political stability will worsen considerably in the short run if junior or middle grade officers take power. Driven more by nationalism and populism than by leftist ideology, these officers are likely to focus first on housecleaning and retribution against former civilian and military officials. The potential for widespread and serious violence will increase substantially as less experienced officers wrestle with holding in check always powerful ethnic, regional, and religious rivalries during a prolonged period of political uncertainty and economic decline.

There is little likelihood in the near term of a significant economic turnaround given Nigeria's volatile political atmosphere, haphazard mechanisms for making and implementing economic policy, and paucity of financial resources. Economic and oil policies are likely to become more unpredictable if the downward economic spiral shows no signs of slowing. If pushed to the wall, frustrated military leaders may consider attempting to "go it alone," breaking with OPEC and renouncing Nigeria's international debt obligations.

Substantial additional revenues—whether from increased oil sales, eased debt burdens, or new loans—would give Lagos some breathing space, but would not contribute much to restoring Nigeria's longer term economic health. Those in power would find it difficult to resist pressure to ease current restrictions and divert added monies into relieving popular hardships, thereby further delaying overdue structural reforms to lessen dependence on oil revenues. Moreover, endemic corruption and maladministration would further dilute the impact of any substantial increase in revenues.

Whoever rules will continue to claim an African leadership role for Nigeria, but Lagos will have few economic resources to influence events and will be preoccupied with domestic concerns. Nevertheless, criticism of Western policies in southern Africa will not abate and probably would increase, particularly under more radical leadership.

Prolonged political ferment will provide new opportunities for the Soviets and the Libyans to increase their now limited influence in Nigeria. While Moscow and Tripoli will find it difficult to make significant inroads as long as senior officers remain in control, a more radical, less sophisticated, and more impressionable field grade officer government probably would be more willing to at least entertain overtures for closer relations, especially if promises of economic and

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military help are used as lures. Moscow and Tripoli also may be able to fan anti-Western attitudes by attempting to lay the blame for current economic conditions at the doorstep of the West and Nigeria's historically pro-Western leaders. In addition, support funneled to radical Muslim groups, disillusioned students, and economically disadvantaged workers is likely to have greater impact as economic conditions deteriorate and the government becomes more shaky. Nevertheless, Moscow and Tripoli's political influence would be limited, particularly since neither is capable or willing of taking on Nigeria's economic burden.

Nigerian-US relations may well become more difficult during the next two years. As long as senior officers hold on, Lagos is likely to avoid an open rupture given Nigeria's close economic ties to the West and its hope that Washington eventually will come to its economic assistance. Relations with a government run by junior or middle grade officers would be considerably more unpredictable. Lagos's tone in dealing with the United States and the West would become more strident and accusatory as less experienced officers, frustrated over their lack of economic choices, seek scapegoats by lashing out at what they see as foreign control of Nigeria's economy. How far such a government would go in abandoning the present close economic ties to the West and abandoning Nigeria's traditionally moderate policies at home is open to question. Although prospects for substantial change are considerable, even radicals will have to contend with the reality of Nigeria's longstanding and extensive ties with the West.

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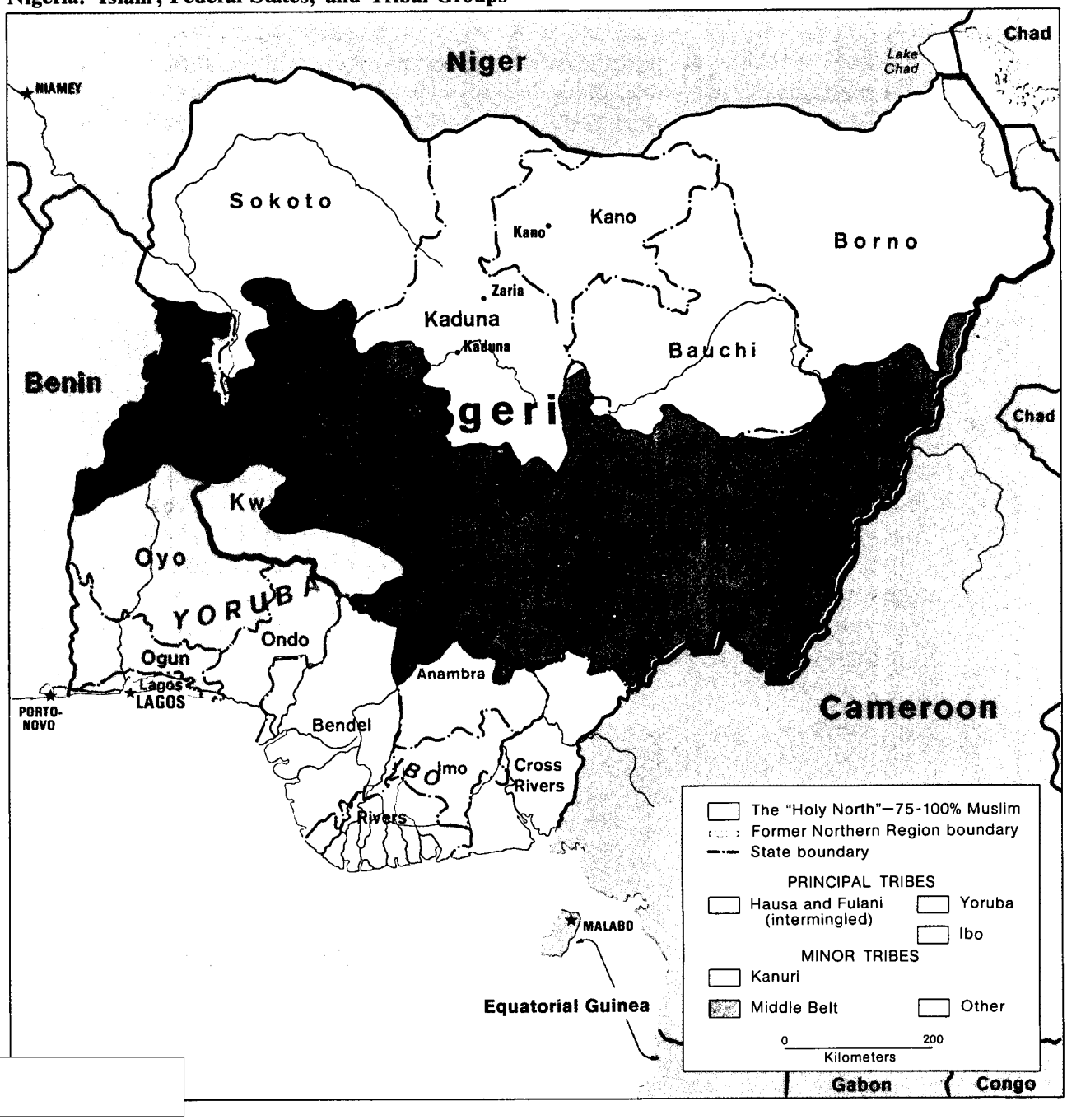
Figure 1
Nigeria: Islam, Federal States, and Tribal Groups



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DISCUSSION

1. Nigeria—almost 25 years after independence—continues to search for political institutions that will allow for political sharing of power; dampen ethnic, regional, and religious rivalries; and wisely use economic resources. Twice—in 1966 and 1983—the Army has overthrown civilian governments, citing as justifications rampant corruption, mismanagement, election rigging, squandering of resources, and sullying of Nigeria's international image. Twice—in 1966 and 1975—Army officers have seized power from fellow officers, accusing them of many of the same political and economic sins committed by discredited civilian regimes. Despite a record of political and ethnic ferment that has led to four coups and a civil war from 1967 to 1970, Nigeria's military and civilian leaders by and large have sought to avoid radical social and political change at home in preference for relatively moderate and pragmatic policies. At the same time, they have sought to maintain close—if sometimes strained and difficult—ties with the West.

2. Nigeria's fifth military Head of State—Major General Muhammadu Buhari, a 41-year-old Muslim Hausa from Kaduna state—since seizing power in December 1983 has attempted to steer his government in the broad tradition of his military and civilian predecessors. Political power rests largely in the hands of senior officers of northern Muslim origin, many of whom served during the 1975-79 military government, and the regime once again has turned to civil servants—mainly holdovers from previous governments—to provide technical and administrative expertise. (See inset.) While Buhari and his fellow officers overthrew former President Shagari's civilian administration, they were quick to assure Nigerians and the international community that the takeover did not signal a turn toward more "radical" policies, and that Lagos would respect existing commitments.

3. In our estimation Nigeria's current moderate military leaders face serious challenges to their leadership and policies. In particular, there appears to be growing concern among younger Nigerians over the degree to which Nigeria's oil wealth has been squandered, and recognition that a "business-as-usual" approach is not a sufficient answer to the seemingly intractable problems of corruption and mismanagement. Nigeria's political climate during the next two years and beyond is likely to become increasingly volatile and unpredictable as leaders and their critics wrestle with what should be done about economic hard times and what government institutions are best suited to hold Nigeria together. While no clear alternative leaders or political philosophies have yet emerged to capture the public imagination, whoever governs Nigeria must now add to their list of difficulties the issue of contending with newer generations of Nigerians who are frustrated with what they see as the "failed politics and policies of the past," and believe their country must recapture its lost promise by moving in new directions.

The Nigerian Military

While members of all three branches of the Nigerian armed forces sit on the present Supreme Military Council (SMC), all the top posts are held by high-ranking officers of the Army. In addition, although it is accurate to describe the SMC as dominated by Muslim northerners, the organization is not an exclusive Muslim nor northern Hausa group.

Overall, the ethnic composition of the armed forces is difficult to ascertain with accuracy, but certain generalizations can be made. Successive Nigerian governments have attempted to recruit proportionally from the various regions. The officer corps historically has been recruited from among leading families and tended to be dominated by northern Muslims, Christian and Muslim Yorubas, and predominantly Christian Middle Belt minority groups. The few Ibos on the SMC hold lower ranking posts and supported the federal government during the civil war.

The organization of the Nigerian armed forces closely parallels US rank structure. The term senior officers refers to those officers at the rank of brigadier and above. "Junior officer" roughly corresponds to the ranks lieutenant through captain; "middle grade officer" corresponds to major, and lieutenant colonel through colonel. The term field grade officers as used throughout the text may include members from the latter two groups.

Responses to the Challenges

4. Buhari and his fellow senior officers began their tenure by pledging decisive action to revive Nigeria's

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flagging economy and to bring corrupt civilian politicians to book. Instead, their actions to date have amounted to a holding action aimed at staving off further economic decline and preventing another coup by junior and middle grade officers, many of whom feel shortchanged by their lack of influence in the postcoup government. Most of the populace see the government as adrift and regard senior officers as little different or better equipped to deal with Nigeria's myriad political and economic problems than their ill-fated civilian predecessors.

Holding Off Economic Collapse

5. Senior officers seized power in the midst of Nigeria's worst economic crisis (see inset) since independence in 1960. While Nigeria's economic downturn stems in part from the inability of the Shagari government to cut spending in the face of dramatically reduced oil revenues, past military governments must also share the blame. Successive military rulers in the 1970s—presented with the prospect of the rapid development fueled by what was then seen as almost unlimited oil revenues—ignored agriculture and embarked on overly ambitious and wasteful industrial development projects. The reckless spending of the oil boom years has dissipated Nigeria's financial resources and has fed corruption, taxed Nigeria's bureaucracy, and widened the gap between the majority of the population and the wealthy in government and business.

6. The early confidence of senior officers that Nigeria's economic slide could be halted simply by more prudent management and the return of ill-gotten gains from former civilian politicians has now given way to a better recognition of the depth of economic problems. This recognition, however, has not led to the charting of an effective economic action plan. With little consistent policy direction from the ruling council and no individual or department charged with overall responsibility for coordinating recovery effects, economic decision making under Buhari continues to be characterized by contradictory economic signals and conflicting policy statements.

7. Early efforts by the military government to force traders to lower prices and increase supplies of consumer goods had little impact beyond alienating powerful trading interests. The regime quickly was forced to shift gears, backing off on promises of better times ahead and calling instead for greater austerity, discipline, and sacrifice in recognition that it had little alternative but to continue many of Shagari's policies. The Buhari government in fact has been forced to pare civil service rolls, cut already inadequate and poorly administered public services, reintroduce unpopular taxes and school fees, further reduce imports, and restrict the power of Nigeria's states to borrow abroad.

8. At the same time, Buhari's economic advisers have fitfully pursued IMF negotiations and debt reschedulings, unsuccessfully sought loans from potential donors such as Saudi Arabia, and obtained a modest increase from OPEC. While key technocrats may recognize the need for an IMF agreement and structural economic reform, senior officers continue to search for less politically risky solutions to Nigeria's economic crisis which so far have proved elusive.

9. The Buhari government continues to pay lipservice to the need to lessen dependence on oil, increase agricultural production, develop indigenous industries, and build Nigeria's infrastructure. From the perspective of the military leaders, however, basic reforms must take a backseat to the politically more pressing priority of making some apparent headway against immediate problems.

Garnering Public Support

10. While there was little public mourning over the demise of civilian government, unhappiness with the Shagari administration has yet to be transformed into active support for the Buhari regime. Although senior officers have tried to present a dynamic image, they appear increasingly at a loss about how to maintain this image as it becomes more and more obvious that they will be unable to fulfill rash promises made in the wake of the coup to get the economy moving, lower prices, clear up salary arrears, and swiftly punish former civilian politicians.

11. Nigerians in past economic good times have exhibited a remarkable tolerance for endemic corruption, political chicanery, and administrative inefficiency and mismanagement. There is increasing evidence, however, that public disenchantment with the seemingly inevitable cycle of failed civilian regimes followed by military regimes is growing and that this disillusionment goes beyond unhappiness with the performance of the government of the day. Although the degree and spread of discontent is difficult to gauge, growing numbers of Nigerians appear to be increasingly cynical about what they see as an unwillingness by traditional elite groups to jeopardize

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Bleaker Economic Times Ahead

Barring a dramatic change in economic policy or an unexpected upsurge in the demand for Nigerian oil, whatever regime governs in Lagos during the next two years is unlikely to make much headway in overcoming the country's daunting array of economic problems. Despite longstanding government promises to lessen dependence on oil, 95 percent of Lagos's total foreign exchange receipts and 80 percent of government revenues still come from oil. Oil production has fallen from a high of 2.3 million barrels per day in 1979 to between 1.3 and 1.6 million barrels per day in 1984 (see chart). Oil revenues this year are likely to reach only $14 billion compared to a peak of $24 billion in 1980.

Shortages of foreign exchange, a buildup in external arrears, and a lack of credit lines have caused shortages of imported raw materials that have virtually crippled most sectors of Nigeria's import-dependent economy. The value of imports in 1983, including those from Nigeria's major trading partners—the US, the UK, France, West Germany, and Japan—declined nearly 30 percent from 1982 levels. Most industries are operating at 25 to 30 percent of capacity, and few companies have been able to avoid large-scale layoffs. More businesses will have to close this year due to the lack of import credits, or failure to shift to domestically produced supplies. In addition, the government has fired thousands from the bloated civil service, reintroduced unpopular taxes and fees, frozen wages, and drastically scaled back or abandoned some overly ambitious development projects. Lagos also has barred further borrowing by the nearly bankrupt 19 states whose share of federally apportioned oil monies—their principal source of revenue—has been cut back drastically by Nigeria's reduced oil earnings.

For many Nigerians, spot shortages of essential commodities (including food), high prices, growing unemployment, and deteriorating public services are making life increasingly difficult and frustrating. Nearly 30 percent of the population lives in urban areas and are dependent on the money economy. Moreover, Nigeria has become a major importer of food since domestic agriculture—inefficient in the best of times and recently hurt by drought conditions—has proved unable to keep pace with population growth averaging 3.4 percent annually according to the US Census Bureau. While previous Nigerian governments have pledged to use oil revenues for social betterment, the average Nigerian today feels he has benefited little from the country's oil wealth which is seen as having ended up in the hands of relatively few businessmen and the government elite.

The growing difficulties associated with doing business in Nigeria along with Lagos's tangled international financial relations are seriously erroding the confidence of foreign investors and creditors. Reports of companies shutting down operations in black Africa's largest and potentially most lucrative market have increased appreciably in the last year. Moreover, the inability of Nigeria to clear up some $6-9 billion in short-term arrears and reach agreement with the IMF are jeopardizing future borrowings.

Nigerian leaders will find their debt increasingly burdensome during the next two years as Lagos is forced to spend an increasingly large portion of export revenues on servicing its debt. Nigeria's debt service on its medium- and long-term debt will exceed $3 billion this year. While Lagos thus far has managed to remain current on these obligations, Nigeria's debt service ratio could climb to 25 percent this year, compared to 3 percent in 1980.

Despite the pressing and recognized need for an IMF agreement, the nationalistic Nigerians are showing growing signs of trying to "go it alone," most likely by increasing oil production, continued tight import restrictions, and trying to coerce favors from their creditors. Lagos's adamant refusal to devalue its currency have put negotiations with the IMF on hold and stalled efforts to reach agreement with official creditors. Moreover, negotiations with potential bilateral donors—such as Saudi Arabia—have proved desultory and show little sign of providing Lagos with significantly increased revenues.

The ability of any Nigerian government to unilaterally manage the country's economic crisis effectively is questionable. Nigeria lacks an effective and timely economic decision making apparatus. And follow-through implementation of policy by the ponderous and inefficient bureacracy is erratic at best. Moreover, Nigeria's administrative weaknesses are compounded by rampant corruption and infrastructure shortcomings that include sporadic power supplies, overburdened transportation facilities, and inefficient industrial plants.

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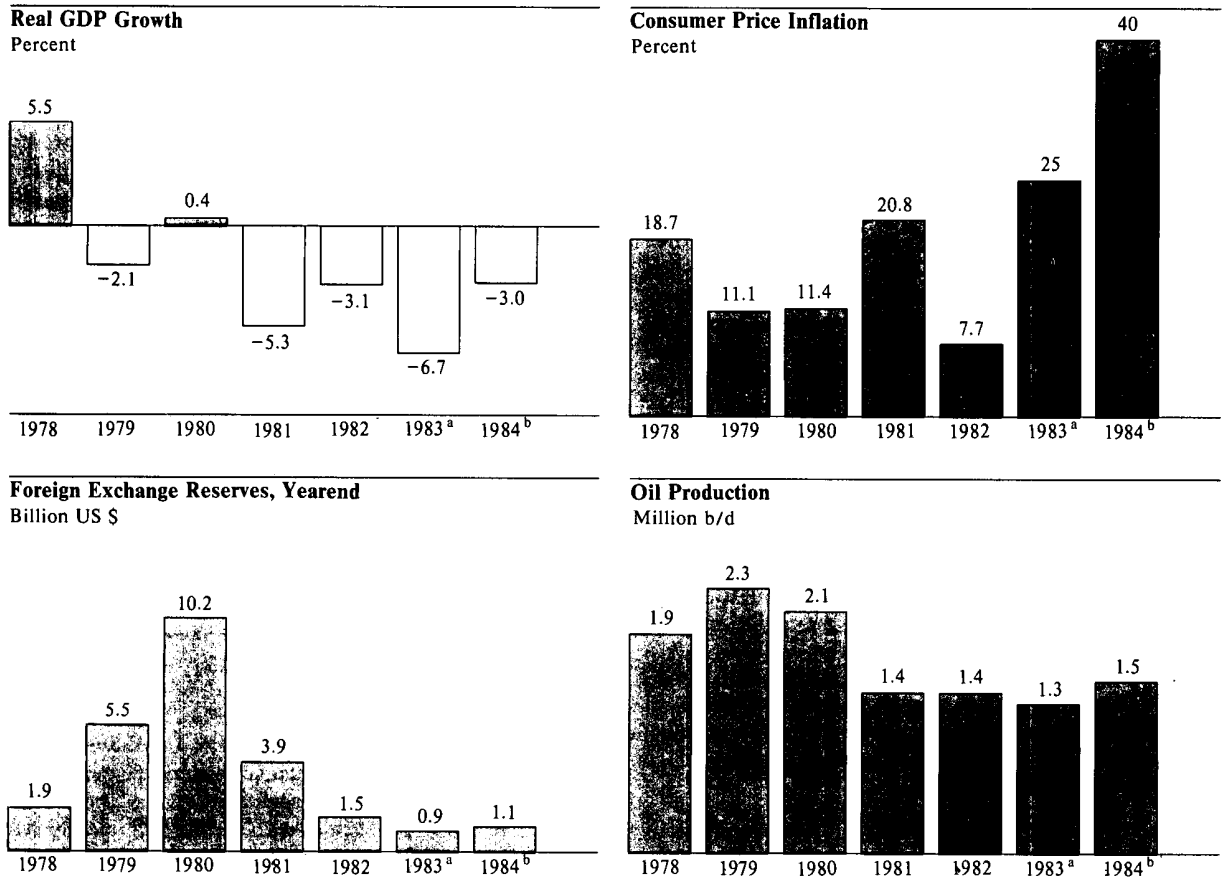
Figure 2
Nigeria: Selected Economic Indicators



[a] Estimated.
[b] Projected.

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their own privileged position by seriously tackling corruption and by their inability to boldly tackle Nigeria's myriad economic and political problems.

12. This general malaise is compounded by southern—particularly the Yoruba—and minority tribe frustration with what they see as simply one more in a long line of northern, Muslim-dominated governments. The Buhari regime's claim that it represents a significant change from past governments has been hurt in the military and public at large by the preponderance of senior northern officers in key positions on the ruling military council, the retention of many powerful technocrats associated with the Shagari administration, and the belief in some circles that key former northern politicians will not be treated as harshly as former southern politicians in corruption trials.

13. Moreover, special interest groups that offered early support for the coup increasingly have voiced growing skepticism as the regime's policies—or lack thereof—impact more directly on their welfare. Students and labor, in particular, have found it difficult to support measures that have included reintroduction of school fees, increased worker layoffs, and wage freezes. While Buhari can take some solace that these groups lack the organization and resources to offer a serious direct challenge, his regime increasingly finds itself being forced to spend scarce political capital to keep students and workers in line.

14. With little to offer Nigerians in the way of economic hope, the regime has been forced to rely heavily on symbolic ploys. The detailing of financial misdeeds of former civilian politicians, fanning Nigerian xenophobia by raising the specter of a mercenary-led invasion and "sinister forces" pushing an IMF agreement, and launching a highly publicized "war against indiscipline" have given the regime some time, but the impact is wearing thin. Moreover, even popular steps such as trying corrupt former politicians carry risks if it appears that the government has singled out certain ethnic or political groups for harsh treatment while overlooking misdeeds of others.

15. Senior officers have become increasingly intolerant of open questioning of their rule. The military has issued decrees that allow press censorship, jailing of critical journalists, and restriction of legal challenges to government decisions. How far the government is willing to go in implementing authoritarian decrees that run counter to Nigeria's traditions of a freewheeling press and independent judiciary remains unclear, but thus far the government has gained little public currency for the moves.

Checking the Military

16. The most immediate and serious threat to the power of senior officers comes from within the military. Nigeria's 130,000-man armed forces are once again an active political arena subject to the ethnic and regional rivalries, personal ambitions, policy disputes, and power plays that characterized civilian politics. Senior officers are well aware of the fragility of the military's cohesion, potential challenges to their authority, and the divisive impact on military discipline and training that comes from renewed military involvement in governing Nigeria, but thus far have been able to do little more than implement stopgap measures designed to forestall coup attempts.

17. There appears to be a growing gap between senior officers—most in their forties and beneficiaries of rapid promotions during past military and civilian governments—and more junior and middle grade officers frustrated over promotion prospects, and their lack of influence with more cautious and conservative superiors. This discontent is compounded among many southern and minority tribal officers who are disillusioned with what they see as persistent northern Muslim domination of national affairs.

18. Thus far, the regime has counted on the shuffling of command and personnel assignments, forced retirements, and its extensive but flawed security apparatus to forestall would-be coup plotters. But these measures also have added to the list of complaints by field grade officers and done little to ameliorate root causes of discontent. Moreover, while the government has attempted to meet the training and equipment needs of the services, there is little evidence to suggest that this has won the government greater loyalty within the ranks.

Chances for Constructive Change

19. Without major changes in economic policy, there is little likelihood during the next two years that the severity of economic and political problems facing the current government will ease or that resources available to the government will dramatically increase. More realistically, the options available to senior officers for launching an effective economic recovery program and developing stable and popular

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political institutions will narrow further. Senior officers will be unable to let down their political guard as they attempt to juggle public demands for immediate improvements with the steps necessary if Nigeria is to begin the difficult tasks it has set for itself of achieving self-sufficiency in food production, lessening dependence on imports, refurbishing and extending the now-decaying infrastructure, streamlining and revitalizing its bureaucracy, and developing nonoil sources of revenue.

Domestic Economic Constraints

20. Nigeria's bleak economic prospects for the next two years will allow the regime to hold out little public hope that living conditions will improve for most Nigerians. The regime will find itself on a constant tightrope as it calls for discipline and sacrifice, promises to pursue "economically responsible" policies, and reaffirms its commitment to economic development. Buhari and his fellow officers face the prospect of constantly scrambling to ensure steady supplies of food, hold prices within reason, and keep import dependent industries at least partially open.

21. Engaged full time in attempting to stave off economic collapse, the government can do little more in the near term other than to reaffirm its commitment to eventual structural changes. There is little prospect that senior officers will feel politically confident enough to embark on economic reform that they believe would produce social dislocations and raise ethnic and political tensions. Reviving agriculture and reducing dependence on food imports will remain the number-one priority, but few significant policy changes to bring this about can be expected. Exacerbating the problem will be a lack of resources, bureaucratic mismanagement, and government uncertainty over how to best proceed. The government will continue to funnel funds into costly high visibility projects, such as the new capital in Abuja and the Ajaokuta steelworks, with little likelihood of an economic payoff.

The International Environment

22. As long as senior officers hold power, Lagos is likely to attempt to avoid renouncing its debts or turning away from its international financial obligations. This is likely to be difficult and frustrating, however, as senior officers resist any "financial strings" that they think could provoke a backlash at home. Moreover, Lagos—even with a good faith effort—will find it difficult to overcome present policy-making and bureaucratic disorganization and strictly adhere to an agreed-upon course of economic action.

23. As senior officers become more economically desperate, they are likely to view increasing oil production as the least politically painful alternative. Senior officers recognize, however, that their leverage on the oil market outside OPEC is limited and will continue to profess support for OPEC. Given current market conditions and Lagos's past commitment, it is unlikely that Nigeria would leave OPEC. Withdrawal from OPEC probably would be viewed as a last desperate resort by senior officers.

24. Substantially increased oil revenues or major loans from bilateral sources such as Saudi Arabia—unlikely prospects—would provide Lagos with more funds and help ease the immediate economic burden. The government would probably use the added revenues to win temporary popularity by loosening import restrictions and increasing government spending. Moreover, the receipt of additional funds probably would postpone consideration of necessary economic readjustment still further.

Administrative Roadblocks

25. Senior officers face a difficult and long-term task in revamping an oversized and inefficient bureaucracy—at both the federal and state levels—that has been hard hit by a lack of resources and policy direction, purges, constant political interference, poor working conditions, and corruption. The issue of corruption will be increasingly burdensome and difficult to sidestep, for all Nigerian governments have found the longer they hold power the more vulnerable they become to charges of corruption. The regime is likely to continue to punish selected individuals found guilty of the most egregious forms of corruption, but move more warily lest pressure for a wider inquiry set off forces that could upset the balance of power and threaten the government's control.

Political Realities

26. The twin impressions that this regime is little more than another in a long line of northern-dominated governments and that it has no new solutions to Nigeria's problems will be increasingly hard to dispel. Symbolic campaigns such as the "war against indiscipline" may make the government appear to be in control, but will be overshadowed by the more power-

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ful image of government indecisiveness and protection of northern interests in the face of economic stagnation.

27. In our estimation, dismal economic prospects, coupled with the growing impression that the government is a contributing factor to the economic decline, could produce a potentially explosive situation. While Nigeria's ethnic, religious, and regional diversity will make it difficult for any nationwide protest movement to gain the cohesive strength necessary to seriously challenge the military for control, the regime might face a growing number of small-scale outbursts against whoever is perceived to be in authority. Urban overcrowding, growing unemployment, delayed salary payments, high prices, shortages of consumer goods including food, and further reductions in already grossly inadequate public services could spark demonstrations that will strain Nigeria's social fabric and weaken the regime's credibility. Even the extensive extended family system—which has cushioned the impact of economic downturns in the past—will be hard pressed to cope.

28. The always contentious issue among southern and minority tribal groups of "northern domination" will become more salient over time if—as appears likely—northern senior officers prove unwilling to give other tribal groups key positions on the ruling military council. In the north, radical Muslim groups—although they can claim little widespread following at present—may find more receptive audiences for their anti-Western antisecular government philosophies as economic conditions worsen. Northern universities will provide particularly fertile recruiting grounds as students search for more satisfying alternatives to what they see as status quo, foreign-influenced secular governments and outmoded, conservative traditional elites.

Uncertain Outlook

29. We do not believe conditions in Nigeria have deteriorated to the point of ungovernability or the imminent disintegration of the Nigerian nation. The continued failure of this regime to exert decisive leadership, however, will undermine the government's credibility and contribute to the growing impression among many Nigerians that more dramatic change is called for. Prolonged leadership crises and unrelenting economic hardship during the next two years are likely to contribute to heightened ethnic, regional, and societal rivalries and may serve as precursors to more widespread and serious societal ferment.

30. For the time being, competition for political power is likely to be waged largely within the military. There is little prospect that they will relinquish control of the political process in the near future, or quickly establish procedures for the orderly transfer of political power to civilian hands. Moreover, although public frustration with military rule is likely to grow as the lack of progress becomes more evident, the widespread perception throughout Nigeria that the last experiment in civilian government was a failure will take time to dissipate. Nevertheless, the military has little choice but to continue relying on civilians for administrative and technical expertise and a mixed military/civilian government could begin to evolve.

Senior Officers Muddle Through

31. Under these circumstances, the most optimistic outlook for Nigeria during the next two years revolves around senior officers muddling through, struggling to limit the political fallout from economic decline and to keep opposition in the military and the public at large off balance and in check. While such a scenario could contribute to a surface calm and impression that Nigeria is "making do" as usual, there is little prospect that senior officers would be able to carry out the more far-reaching economic reforms that would contribute to political stability.

32. Senior officers are likely to continue to publicly state their commitment to honor Nigeria's economic obligations. At the same time, however, the regime also is likely to become increasingly desperate to record any success. Sharply worsening economic conditions could lead the regime to believe that, despite the negative economic impact, it has no political choice but to chance dramatic action. Moves such as formally breaking off negotiations with the IMF, leaving OPEC, a debt moratorium, or renouncing Nigeria's foreign debt, however, would win the regime only temporary popular acclaim, at the cost of longer term economic recovery.

33. Senior officers will become less tolerant of open opposition as public disillusionment and military frustration mount. The regime will move forcefully to crush any challenge to its rule whether from labor and students, the press, or spontaneous outbursts by religious fanatics. Efforts to clamp down, however, proba-

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bly would be viewed by much of the public as a sign of weakness rather than strength.

34. Even if senior officers manage to discover plots and fend off coup attempts by disgruntled officers, living with the constant threat of a coup, steadily eroding public support, and insurmountable economic problems will increase the probability of dissension within the ruling military council. Conflicts are likely to be particularly intense among ambitious senior officers on the ruling military council, particularly among those now holding largely political positions, and those who still command troops. Leadership shuffles including the strong possibility of a palace coup are likely. The new leadership would attempt to demonstrate greater vigor, but such a coup could result in a narrower power base and create new political and ethnic divisions, making the regime all the more vulnerable to a coup from below.

Nigerian-US Relations

35. The tone of Nigerian-US relations will be determined in large part by Lagos's hopes for US sympathy for Nigeria's economic plight and willingness to come to Nigeria's aid, including interceding with the IMF for less rigorous terms for financial support. While senior officers are likely to attempt to avoid a sharp rupture in Nigerian-US ties, relations may become more testy in the face of persistent demands from the Western governments and creditors that Lagos adopt policies along the lines proposed by the IMF. Senior officers will find it difficult, as the economy deteriorates, to resist laying blame for the current mess at the doorstep of the West, international creditors, and the IMF. Lagos will continue, however, the timeworn Nigerian practice of pleading for understanding of its "unique" problems and stressing the need for Nigeria's "friends" to distinguish between the government's public statements geared for domestic consumption and its more reassuring private demarches on political issues.

36. The thrust of any initiatives, however, will be blunted by preoccupation with domestic politics, a shortage of economic resources, a lack of clear policy goals, and other African states' suspicions of—and in some cases hostility to—Nigeria's motives. Nevertheless, Lagos will continue to claim—and fitfully pursue—a leadership role in continental African affairs, regardless of the depth of the domestic economic crisis. Senior officers, for example, will continue to call publicly for an OAU solution to the Chadian conflict and vehemently criticize South African racial policies.

37. Lagos's perception of its common interests within the Nonaligned Movement, its suspicion of Western involvement in African affairs, and public sentiment in Nigeria are unlikely to make Nigeria back or side with US and Western initiatives on issues such as Namibia, Cuban troop withdrawals from Angola, or Chad. As long as senior officers hold sway, however, the government is likely to attempt at the least to temper Nigeria's proclivity for critical rhetoric. On larger East-West issues, Lagos will attempt to maintain a nonaligned posture, while leaning toward the West. The United States and its European allies, however, should have little hope that Lagos will take the lead in rounding up support for the West or that Nigeria's uncoordinated foreign policy making apparatus can be counted on to pursue consistent policies.

Opportunities for Outside Meddling

38. The Soviet Union and Libya can expect to gain little influence in government circles, particularly as long as senior officers hold the reins of power. Individual officers within the ruling council, however, may prove receptive to overtures, especially if they carry the promise of personal economic gain. Senior officers are likely to attempt to maintain "correct" relations with powers such as Libya and the Soviet Union, while in reality holding these powers at arm's length. Nigeria's economic desperation, however, is likely to drive Lagos to open negotiations with any power that could be a potential aid donor. These negotiations are unlikely to signal a change in policy or serve as forerunners to closer or more extensive ties.

39. Outside powers can, and probably will attempt to gain influence among frustrated ethnic, religious, or other interest groups. While Moscow or Tripoli could gain some following among increasingly disillusioned Nigerians in search of alternatives to lackluster military rule, Nigeria's social divisions will make it difficult for any group—especially one tied to outside powers—to gain a widespread following. Nevertheless, the potential power of these dissident groups to disrupt an already shaky Nigerian government far outweighs their current numerical weakness.

40. Opportunities for outside influence appear greatest among radical northern Muslim religious groups or among leftist student and labor groups frustrated over what they see as the failure of conservative, status quo oriented governments to radically transform Nigeria. Libya, for example, could find sympathetic reaction among some northern Muslims who reject both the secular national government and the traditional northern emirate system.

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Prospects for Overthrow

41. In our estimation, there is a high probability during the next two years that Nigeria's senior officers will be faced with a coup attempt by less senior officers and a better-than-even chance that such a coup would succeed in toppling the current regime. The persistent threat of a coup will strain the cohesion of the military and severely test the authority of senior officers. Unable to take the loyalty of less senior officers for granted, the Buhari government—or any successor government—faces the prospect of constantly shuffling command assignments and retiring suspect officers in an effort to forestall coups. Such moves—along with extensive security surveillance—are likely to uncover some coup plotters and deter others, but will do little to ameliorate the root causes of discontent, and, in fact, will produce intensified grumbling about senior officer favoritism and tampering with military procedures.

42. No clear consensus about how Nigeria should be governed or who should hold power has formed among the lower ranking officers. These officers' discontent ranges from frustration over their lack of influence with senior officers, to unhappiness with the cautious and conservative policies of the Buhari government, to grumbling over the handling of service conditions, including the potentially explosive issue of promotions. Moreover, there appears to be an increasing gap between senior officers whose moderate outlook has been shaped by extensive foreign military training, participation in the civil war, and firsthand experience with the difficulties of governing Nigeria, and more junior officers—many of whom have been trained in Nigerian defense schools—who have been strongly influenced by their perceptions of failed civilian rule, declining international prestige, and the squandering of Nigeria's oil resources.

Likely Successor Regimes—Turning Away From Moderation?

43. The policy direction and stability of any government that comes to power by way of a junior or middle grade officers' coup will depend in large measure on how violent the coup is, and on the ethnic composition and ideological bent of the conspirators. Any such coup, however, is likely to set in train more coup plotting among those whose own plans for a coup may have been preempted. As a consequence, such a coup will heighten political uncertainty, increase tribal and regional tensions, severely undermine the integrity of the armed forces, and do little to resolve the economic dilemma facing Nigeria.

Moderate Officers Seize Power

44. A majority of junior and middle grade officers, many with US training, probably continue to believe that Nigeria's problems could be corrected if only the government had the will to proceed with vigor and to take decisive action. Should a broad-based ethnic coalition of relatively moderate junior and middle grade officers take control, they would probably attempt to steer a more reformist than radical course. At the outset of their rule, the necessity of solidifying their political control would supersede the elaboration of a comprehensive economic recovery plan.

45. In the short run, inexperienced, idealistic, and politically unsophisticated junior and middle grade officers would be overwhelmed by the magnitude of their economic task and the impossibility of producing quick results. Under pressure from colleagues favoring more sweeping changes, the moderates could feel forced to embark on more stridently nationalistic policies, an extensive housecleaning of the bureaucracy and armed forces, or perhaps even the execution of some former civilian and military leaders deemed responsible for the current economic mess.

46. Foreign and domestic policies would become more unpredictable and erratic as the regime desperately sought to win public favor and at least give the appearance of making economic headway. Lacking the resolve and support to stay with politically painful economic recovery policies whose political payoff was years away, the regime would fall back on stopgap measures in an effort to prevent the economic and political situation from deteriorating further.

47. Relations with the United States and other Western governments would be more uncertain, but the new regime, at least in its early days, probably would continue looking to Washington for understanding and support. The government probably also would call for a more activist foreign policy and a "harder" line on southern African issues, but prove unable to go beyond harsher and more bellicose rhetoric because of preoccupation with securing domestic control. At the least, the United States could expect stepped-up and more unrealistic pleas for economic help as well as even greater skepticism from Lagos concerning the wisdom of acceding to an IMF economic reform package.

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48. Although moderate, this successor government would be more inclined to publicly extol the virtues of nonalignment and give powers such as the Soviet Union and Libya a closer hearing, especially if promises of economic assistance are offered. However, the regime would see little to be gained by chancing an outright rupture with the US, the UK, and other Western nations, Nigeria's most important economic and military partners. As a consequence, any advantage to be gained by the Soviet Union and Libya would come from support they offered to dissident radical groups to undermine what is certain to be an inherently unstable regime.

Radical Officers Seize Power

49. Whoever governs Nigeria also must contend with the threat of a coup by junior and middle grade officers who believe that only a "revolutionary cleansing" can set Nigeria on the road to economic recovery, political order, and regional leadership. While some of these officers undoubtedly will have gained exposure to radical ideologies during their school years, the great majority will have been "radicalized" by frustration with what they see as the decadence of civilian and military elites and the inability of past governments to bring progress to Nigeria. This frustration is fueled in the case of many southern and minority tribe officers by bitter resentment over what they see as their consignment to permanent second-class status in a northern-dominated military establishment.

50. The regime probably would begin on a highly populist and nationalistic note, concentrating first on violently lashing out at the symbols of past governments, including wide-scale executions of former civilian and military leaders. Radical leaders would show little hesitation in making grandiose—and wildly contradictory—promises about what can be accomplished, but quickly would discover that Nigeria's economic problems were not correctable by the issuing of a series of decrees. Ongoing economic negotiations would move back to square one with radical leaders at least tempted to claim agreements reached and obligations incurred by the former regime invalid.

51. A radical regime—if for no other reason than that it held out the promise of change—could enjoy an initial wave of public support, but tolerance would wane as it became apparent that economic and political conditions were not going to improve. The regime also would encounter foot-dragging from existing elites and conservative interest groups. Unchecked by a strong central government, ethnic, regional, religious, and social tensions probably would increase rapidly. In the longer run, a prolonged political vacuum, worsening economic conditions, and heightened social and ethnic tensions would create a climate of political chaos and could provoke widespread violence, perhaps setting the stage for a second civil war.

52. The shortrun stability of a radical government would depend in large measure on the ethnic composition of the new ruling council. In a worst case situation, a coup that struck out violently at northern interests and was dominated by southern or minority tribesmen would come under immediate threat of a countercoup by remaining northerners in the Army. Nor would another northern dominated government bring political stability to Nigeria. Under these conditions, the integrity of the armed forces could come under challenge as competing factions struggled for power.

53. The USSR and Libya probably would look for opportunities to ingratiate themselves with groups appearing to have the best prospect of coming out on top in the power struggle. Even should they back the "winner," however, their success probably would be a mixed blessing. Neither Moscow nor Tripoli could count on such a shaky government to assure them of long-term influence. Neither is willing nor able to supplant the West and assume Nigeria's crushing economic burden.

54. Western and US interests would suffer under a radical government which probably would fan Nigerian xenophobia by encouraging distrust of Western banking and business interests, and by raising the specter of a Western-backed, antiregime destabilization effort. Radical leaders probably would promise a more "independent" oil policy and a lessening of Nigeria's economic dependence on the West, and perhaps even could threaten to expropriate some Western interests in Nigeria. In the longer run and in the absence of other alternatives, Lagos's dependence on the West as its chief export market, major supplier of imports, and most important source of capital could work to temper Nigerian radicalism. In the short run, however, Western leverage and interests almost certainly would be harmed. Moreover, the breach in Nigeria's traditionally close relations with the West would take considerable time to heal.

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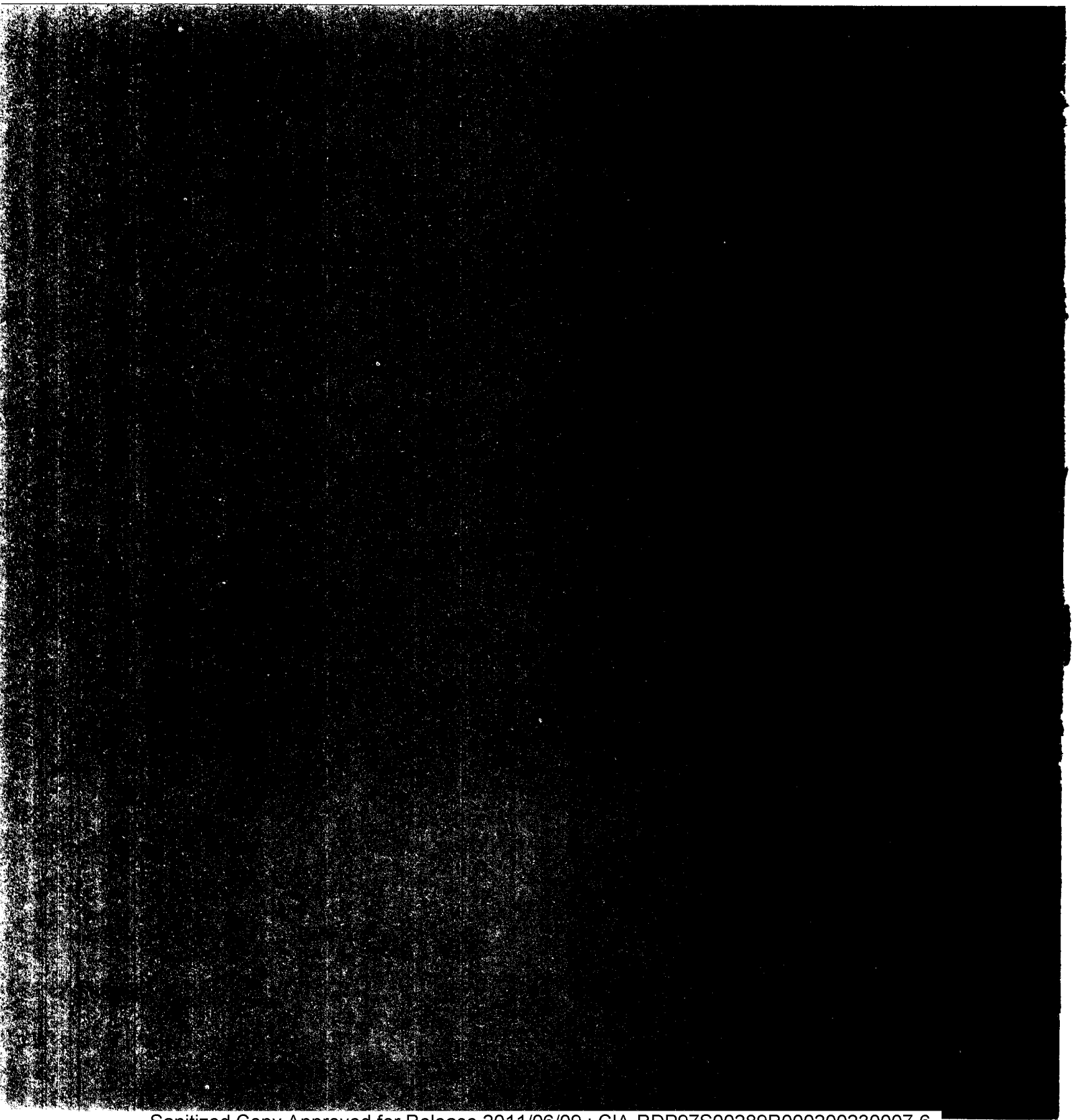

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